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# **ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATION FROM THE ORIGINAL ENGLISH TO THE SPANISH VERSION OF TWO AMERICAN COMEDY SERIES: FRIENDS AND THE BIG BANG THEORY**

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Curs acadèmic 2014-15

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Facultat de Traducció i d'Interpretació

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## Dades del TFG

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**Títol:** *Analysis of problems in translation from the original English to the Spanish version of two American comedy series: Friends and The Big Bang Theory*

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## Paraules clau

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Cultural references, humor, translation, translation mistakes, American TV shows, dubbing  
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estadounidenses, doblaje

## Resum del TFG

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This research focuses on two American TV shows, *Friends* and *The Big Bang Theory*. The analysis and comparison of translation segments of both shows in the original version in English and the dubbed version in Spanish enable the translation of humor in general to be studied, and, most specifically, culture-related humor. Some translation mistakes are also described. For each translation segment considered improvable a solution has been proposed. Both shows feature cultural references although *Friends* contains more, and there hasn't been coherence in their translation. Also, a significant number of translation mistakes were identified in *Friends*, which will clearly affect the popularity of the show in Spanish. Even though *The Big Bang Theory* was translated better, some humor has been lost whereas on many occasions it could have been preserved.

Este trabajo se centra en dos series estadounidenses: *Friends* y *The Big Bang Theory*. El análisis y la comparación de segmentos de traducción de ambas series en la versión original en inglés y en la versión española doblada permiten estudiar la traducción del humor en general y especialmente del humor relacionado con la cultura. También se describen algunos errores de traducción. Para cada segmento de traducción mejorable se ha propuesto una solución. Las dos series presentan referencias culturales aunque *Friends* tenga más, y no ha habido coherencia en su traducción. Además, se han detectado un número importante de errores de traducción en *Friends*, lo cual afectará claramente la popularidad de la serie en español. Aunque *The Big Bang Theory* se haya traducido mejor, en ocasiones se ha perdido el humor mientras que se podría haber conservado.

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## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

All my life, even before I started studying translation, I've heard that humor is one of the most important characteristics of a culture (and a language). It is, therefore, one of the most difficult things to translate. But what is humor?

*Humor* or *Humour* actually comes from Old French *humour* that comes from Latin *humor* or *umor*, which originally meant "moisture" or "liquid". It also referred to the bodily fluids; in fact, today, we still talk about aqueous humor and vitreous humor, that are fluids of the eye. *Humor* was especially used for the cardinal humors (blood, phlegm, yellow bile or choler, and black bile). They were thought to determine a person's state or characteristics. For example, blood symbolized happiness and choler violence. The perfect "temperament" was when none of these humors dominated. This is why *humor* meant "mental disposition". Later, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it started to mean "state of mind, mood". It also meant "whim, caprice, fancy" (probably a pejorative version of *mood*). In fact, the verb *to humor someone* means "to indulge a person's whim". Over time, it acquired a connotation of funniness or laughableness and lost the *whim* connotation.

The definition of *humor* in the Oxford Dictionaries on line states that it is "the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech: *his tales are full of humor*" and "the ability to express humor or make other people laugh". We all know what humor is. What's interesting, however, is that what's humor made of makes it very specific to a culture. As Roger Axtell said, "Every culture enjoys some form of humor. But, humor has difficulty crossing cultural boundaries because what is humorous in one country is often not humorous in another." Indeed, humor often involves wordplays, colloquial expressions and a lot of cultural references (about art, politics, accents, etc.)

By definition, translation is trying to make a message "cross cultural boundaries" and this is why it is so hard to translate humor. I think that this is the most difficult thing to translate, even more than specialized texts, for which we have many resources to help us find the equivalent terms we need. However, even when we've reached the point of culture and language understanding that allows us to understand humor, we still have to make it funny in the same way in the target language.

After many years of English study, I finally managed to watch *Friends* and other TV shows in English (at first, with English subtitles). I personally had seen them in French my whole life, and when I switched to English I found them even funnier. And, like everyone that starts watching series in original version, I became addicted.

This is the reason I decided to study two American TV shows (their original version and their Spanish translation). My aims were to identify the strategies employed by the translator to translate elements of *humour* as well as cultural references, and assess how successful these are in conveying the meaning of the script and preserving the *humour*. I also wanted to find out if there was a difference in the way of dealing with the humor problems in the two shows, since they weren't aired at the same time. The first show I chose was *Friends*, an American sitcom about six friends in their 30s living in New York. It aired between 1994 and 2004. The second show I chose was *The Big Bang Theory*, also an American sitcom about the contrast



between 4 scientific boys in California and the new neighbor of two of them (a waitress with no studies). It premiered on 2007 and is now at its 8<sup>th</sup> season.

## Methodology

My methodology has been to listen to the episode in original version (English) while reading the script in Spanish. I looked for translation problems (not only mistakes). In class, the teachers also call them “rich points” and consider that a segment is a translation problem when you actually have to stop writing your translation and look for solutions; it can be in dictionaries, on the internet, but it can also be in your head, when we look for a way to preserve humor and have to be creative. When I found a translation problem or something worth discussing, I paused, and I looked at that bit in Spanish version, to rule out any transcription error and to listen to the tone of voice, that can also be a way of transmitting humor. Then, there are two possible situations: either I understood the joke or humor or cultural reference in English and I saw the mistake, or I didn’t understand it but see that something has been lost in the way or is different. In that second scenario, I looked up any words or cultural references that I didn’t understand, and then decided if I was right that something got lost. When I was finished explaining the problem, I just tried to find a better solution in Spanish and also tried to match the length of the sentence, saying it out loud to see if the actor would have time to say it, since I’m comparing the original version with the Spanish dubbing.

*Note: The episodes were randomly selected (the first three episodes of the first season for both series and then episodes from any season) to insure better neutrality.*

## Objectives

- Identify examples of humor in the scripts, classify them in three categories (cultural references, humor, translation mistakes), describe the strategy used to translate them, assess to what extent they have been successfully translated and propose improvements to translation when necessary and/or possible
- Compare the translation of both series considering their different dates of production and airing.
- Analyze in-depth the translation of humor in general, the translation strategies (whether it has been adapted for a Spanish audience) and discuss the effect of translation on the popularity of cultural products in general (mainly focusing on books, movies and TV series)

## Literature

I decided to support my research with the following bibliography:

MARTÍNEZ SIERRA, Juan José. *Humor y traducción: Los Simpson cruzan la frontera*. Castelló de la Plana: Universitat Jaume I, 2008. 271 p. ISBN: 9788480216364.

MARTÍNEZ SIERRA, Juan José. *Reflexiones sobre la traducción audiovisual: tres espectros, tres momentos*. Valencia: Universitat de València, 2012. 263 p. ISBN: 9788437090641.

MATEO MARTÍNEZ-BARTOLOMÉ, Marta. *La Traducción del humor: las comedias inglesas en español*. Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo. Servicio de Publicaciones, 1995. 311 p. ISBN: 8474688701

OROZCO JUTORÁN, Mariana. *Metodología de la Traducción Directa del Inglés al Español: Materiales didácticos para traducción general y especializada*. Granada: Comares, 2012. 293 p. ISBN: 9788498369182.

Besides those books, the only interesting article I found on the Internet about translating American series is an article:

MARTÍNEZ SIERRA, J. *La manipulación del texto: sobre la dualidad extranjerización/familiarización en la traducción del humor en textos audiovisuales*. Sendebarr, Norteamérica, 17, jul. 2013. Disponible en: <<http://revistaseug.ugr.es/index.php/sendebarr/article/view/1017>>. Fecha de acceso: 18 may. 2015.

In this article, he talks about domestication and foreignizing (respectively, to bring closer to the target culture or to transpose it and let it as it was, just translating it). He obviously talks about cultural references and different approaches when faced with several situations. One of the interesting things that he mentions (in the part “*La duda: traducir o crear*”) is that, when faced with a joke that doesn’t exist in the target language, when we’ve chosen to domesticate the text, we end up creating a new one. He also says that if what we want is that the audience laugh at the same time that the audience in the original version, we have a functional approach. Therefore, when we have that functional approach, we have to create much more than translate when it comes to cultural references, jokes and humor.

## Discussion of translation segments

The table below details all the segments containing cultural references, humor and translation mistakes that I identified in the episodes analyzed. I will discuss them in chronological order, starting with the Friends series.

	<i>Friends</i>	<i>The Big Bang Theory</i>
Cultural references	7	3
Humor	5	4
Translation mistakes	9	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>
Well-translated segments* / total translation segments	14%	36%

*\* I consider “well-translated segments” the ones that I have described as “a good solution” or “a good translation” in the discussion.*

## **Friends: season 1 episode 1**

**Scene:** Rachel, a bride, is explaining to her friends why she ran off of her wedding.

Rachel: "I realized that I was more turned on by this gravy boat than by Barry! And then I got really freaked out, and that's when it hit me: how much Barry looks like Mr. Potato Head. Y'know, I mean, I always knew looked familiar, but..."

**Translation:**

Rachel: "¡Me di cuenta de que aquella salsera me excitaba más que Barry! Al principio aluciné un poco, pero entonces descubrí lo mucho que Barry se parece al hombre del tiempo. Ya me entendéis, me resultaba alguien familiar, pero..."

**Comments:**

At first, I thought that this sentence had been translated this way because Mr. Potato Head wasn't famous in Spain, but it's not the case: it's called "El señor Patata" in Spain. I didn't really understand why the translator chose to change it since this is a cultural reference that Spanish do know, but the only hypothesis that came to my mind was that maybe Mr. Potato Head wasn't famous at that time. For the record, Friends' premiere aired in the United States in 1994 and in Spain in 1997. Mr. Potato Head became famous in the U.S. before the release of "Toy Story" movie, since it was released in 1995 in the U.S. and the first Friends episode aired in 1994, but even if we consider that in Spain he became famous only thanks to this movie, it still is incoherent: the movie was released in Spain in 1996. So why didn't the translator simply say: "*Barry se parece al señor Patata*"?

**Category:** Cultural reference

**Scene:** Paul, Monica's date, is talking about the fact that his girlfriend cheated on him.

Paul: I know, I know, I'm such an idiot. I guess I should have caught on when she started going to the dentist four or five times a week. I mean, how clean can teeth get?

**Translation:**

Paul: Lo sé, lo sé, soy un idiota, debería habérmelo imaginado cuando ella empezó a ir al dentista cuatro o cinco veces por semana. ¿Cuánto vale un empaste?

**Comments:**

Here, the scene is still funny, but that big a change is unjustified, in my opinion. I wonder why the translator didn't say something closer to the original: it would have been funnier, because this way we understand that what Paul means is that she didn't have any reason to go to the dentist 4 or 5 times a week. However, in Spanish, it seems that he's just explaining why it is impossible that she went that often without talking about the fact that she didn't have any reason to do so. It seems like he's saying "Well, it is obvious she was cheating, she couldn't afford to go to the dentist 4 or 5 times a week". Of course, but that is not the main reason he should have been alarmed... The first reason is that nobody goes to the dentist this often. Maybe the translator could have said "*¿Se puede tener tantas caries?*", "*Sus dientes ya no podían estar más limpios*". Of course, maybe the problem was the length of the sentence and this is why the translator chose to say something shorter.

**Category:** translation mistake

**Scene:** Monica and Paul are having dinner (they are on their first date) and Paul has some trouble telling her something, he's embarrassed.

Paul: No, it's, it's more of a fifth date kind of revelation.

Monica: Oh, so there is gonna be a fifth date?

**Translation:**

Paul: No... Es que es algo que debería contarte en la próxima cita.

Mónica: Oh, ¿así que va a haber una quinta cita?

**Comments:**

Here, this is purely and solely a translation mistake. If Monica and Paul were on their fourth date, it wouldn't be an issue at all. Saying "*próxima*" and then "*quinta*" would be totally fine. But we know that it is their first date, since Monica's brother, Ross, says earlier in the episode: "Paul, the wine guy Paul? He finally asked you out?" and it is translated in Spanish "*¿Paul... el representante de vinos? ¿Por fin te ha invitado a salir?*". Therefore, the Spanish audience will not understand this incoherence at all. It should have been translated "*es que es algo que debería contarte en la quinta cita*", or "*es algo que se debería contar en la quinta cita*".

**Category:** translation mistake

**Scene:** Ross is explaining to his friends why he is too shy to ask a girl out (his wife he had been with for 7 years just left him). “Grab a spoon” is a reference to a phrase said earlier by Joey that means “taste new ice-cream flavors”, meaning “try asking somebody out”.

Ross: (scornful) “Grab a spoon”. Do you know how long it's been since I've grabbed a spoon? Do the words 'Billy, don't be a hero' mean anything to you?

**Translation:**

Ross: (Afligido) ¿Que coja un cucurucho...? ¿Sabes cuánto hace que no cojo un cucurucho? ¿Las palabras 'No te hagas el héroe' significan algo para ti?

**Comments:**

This is a cultural reference that only English speakers could understand. “Billy, don’t be a hero” was an anti-war song released in 1974. It was very famous in the United Kingdom and in the United States, but not at all in Spain. By making reference to it, Ross means that he hasn’t asked out a girl since a very long time ago (he is exaggerating, since he met his wife 10 years earlier, i.e. in 1984). The translator could have picked any cultural reference of at least 10 years. Since Ross was exaggerating, they could have made a reference to any event in the 30’s, the 40’s, etc. If the general purpose of the translation was to adapt the soap opera to the Spanish culture, they could have referred to any famous Spanish song released before the 70’s. If the general purpose was to stay close to the original, which I guess it was, they could have picked any internationally famous song of the 70’s or before. For example, if we chose to adapt it, we could say: “¿Sabes cuánto hace que no cojo un cucurucho? ¿Las palabras “La vida es una tómbola” significan algo para ti?”. If we chose not to adapt it, we could say “¿Sabes cuánto hace que no cojo un cucurucho? ¿Las palabras “Let it be” significan algo para ti?”. In any case, I think anything would have been better than “No te hagas el héroe”.

**Category:** Cultural references

**Scene:** Chandler, Joey, Monica and Rachel are talking and Chandler has to go to work.

Chandler: All right, kids, I gotta get to work. If I don't input those numbers ... it doesn't make much of a difference...

**Translation:**

Chandler: Bueno chicos es hora de irse a trabajar... Hay que ingresar pasta en la cuenta... aunque veo que no os importa mucho.

**Comments:**

I think this is a misunderstanding of the translator. By saying that it doesn't make any difference to input numbers, he means that what he does is useless, that he doesn't feel helpful at work and maybe that nobody cares about him there. However, in the Spanish translation, it seems like he means that his friends don't care about what he is saying. What's more, we can actually see that they are all looking at him while he is saying this, so it doesn't make any sense. An easy solution could have been: "*Si no registro esos números... no se verá la diferencia*" or "*nadie se dará cuenta*".

**Category:** Translation mistake



**Scene:** Everyone is sitting next to Rachel telling her to be independent and stop using her parents' money and Phoebe tells her that she understands that it is hard to be alone in the city for the first time because she "lived the same thing when her mom killed herself when she was 14", except that it is way more serious than what Rachel is living, so she doesn't know what to reply.

Phoebe: Give her a break, it's hard being on your own for the first time.

Rachel: Thank you.

Phoebe: You're welcome. I remember when I first came to this city. I was fourteen. My mom had just killed herself and my step-dad was back in prison, and I got here, and I didn't know anybody. And I ended up living with this albino guy who was, like, cleaning windshields outside port authority, and then he killed himself, and then I found aromatherapy. So believe me, I know exactly how you feel.

(Pause)

Ross: The word you're looking for is "Anyway..."

**Translation:**

Phoebe: Dale un respiro, es difícil ser independiente por primera vez.

Rachel: Gracias.

Phoebe: De nada. Recuerdo que cuando llegué a esta ciudad tenía catorce años. Mi madre acababa de suicidarse y mi padrastro estaba en la cárcel... ¡otra vez! No conocía absolutamente a nadie y acabé viviendo con un tipo albino que limpiaba parabrisas enfrente de la estación de trenes... hasta que se suicidó... entonces descubrí la aromaterapia. Así que créeme sé exactamente cómo te sientes.

(Todos se quedan sin saber qué decir, sobre todo Rachel)

Ross: La expresión que estás buscando es... "no me extraña..."

**Comments:**

When you know the show, you can deduce from what Ross says in the Spanish translation that "it's no wonder, now that I know Phoebe's story, that she is so weird". But it's the first episode, and we have hardly seen Phoebe acting strange, so it's a little confusing. Besides, what Ross means is that she doesn't find anything to say after this sad story that Phoebe compares to Rachel's even though they have nothing in common, so he tells Rachel to continue saying what she was saying like if nothing had happened. A good translation could have been "*La expresión que estás buscando es... "En fin..."*" or "*Como decía..."*".

**Category:** Translation mistake

## **Friends: season 1 episode 2**

**Scene:** Rachel has lost a ring and she tries to remember when she had it on for the last time.

Rachel: I know I had it this morning, and I know I had it when I was in the kitchen with...

Chandler: ...Dinah?

**Translation:**

Rachel: Sé que lo tenía esta mañana... sé que lo llevaba cuando estaba en la cocina con...

Chandler: ...Arguiñano?

**Comments:**

I think this is a great solution to this translation problem, because obviously the Spanish audience won't know the American song "I've Been Working on the Railroad", which lyrics say "Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah". However, the translator has to be careful about making the show "too Spanish", but it depends on what the producers and distributors want: to adapt it to Spanish culture or to be as American as possible.

**Category:** Cultural reference

**Scene:** Ross and Monica (they are brother and sister) are having dinner with their parents who only criticize Monica, telling her that she doesn't have a boyfriend, that the dinner she's made is very simple, etc., so Monica tells Ross to tell them what happened between him and his ex-wife Carol, so that they will let her off the hook for a while.

Ross: Okay! Okay. (To his parents) Look, I, uh- I realize you guys have been wondering what exactly happened between Carol and me, and, so, well, here's the deal. Carol's a lesbian. She's living with a woman named Susan. She's pregnant with my child, and she and Susan are going to raise the baby.

(Stunned silence ensues.)

Mrs. Geller: (To Monica) And you knew about this?!

**Translation:**

Ross: De acuerdo... vale (a sus padres) Veréis yo... sé que os estaréis preguntando que habrá pasado exactamente entre Carol y yo... así que esto es lo que pasa. Carol es lesbiana. Vive con una mujer que se llama Susan. Ahora está embarazada de mí. Pero ella y Susan van a criar al bebé.

(Silencio)

Sra. Geller: (A Mónica) ¿Y tú no has podido evitarlo?!

**Comments:**

The main idea is transmitted: Monica and Ross' mother always finds a way to criticize Monica even if something bad happened to someone else and she had nothing to do with it. But I think that in the Spanish translation the mother is too severe, telling her that she could have avoided a woman to be a lesbian and to get pregnant... But above all, I really don't know why it couldn't be translated as "*¿Y tú lo sabías?*" or "*¿Y no me has dicho nada?*".

**Category:** translation mistake

**Scene:** Ross, Carol (his ex-wife) and Susan (her girlfriend) are talking about names for the future baby. (Willick is Carol's last name)

Susan: Oh, please! What's wrong with Helen?

Ross: Helen Geller? I don't think so.

Carol: Hello? It's not gonna be Helen Geller.

Ross: Thank you!

Carol: No, I mean it's not Geller.

Ross: What, it's gonna be Helen Willick?

**Translation:**

Susan: ¡Oh, por favor! ¿Qué tiene de malo Helen?

Ross: Helen Geller? No me parece bien.

Carol: De acuerdo, no se llamará Helen Geller.

Ross: ¡Gracias!

Carol: No, quiero decir Geller.

Ross: ¿Qué...? ¿Cómo se llamara? ¿Willick?

**Comments:**

Susan is saying "Hello? It's not going to be Helen Geller" because anyway the baby will not be named "Geller" as in Ross' last name. But when she says that, it can look like she's just saying that calling the baby Helen is totally out of the table, which is why Ross believes that in the first place. But in Spanish, she says "*De acuerdo*", as if she said "Well okay, you're right, we're not going to call the baby like that", which is totally wrong, because then she says "*No, quiero decir Geller*". She obviously hasn't agreed just now not to call her baby Geller, she decided it herself first and anyway Ross wants to call the baby Geller so she can't agree with him. A good solution could have been "*A ver, no se llamará Helen Geller*" or "*Claro que no se llamará Helen Geller*".

**Category:** translation mistake

### **Friends: season 1 episode 3**

**Scene:** Phoebe is coming back from a date she just had, and tells her friends that her date told her “We should do this again” and they all know it is a bad sign besides Rachel, so they try to explain her why it is a bad sign.

Monica: Uh, no. Loosely translated 'We should do this again' means 'You will never see me naked'.

Rachel: Since when?

Joey: Since always. It's like dating language. You know, like 'It's not you' means 'It is you'.

Chandler: Or 'You're such a nice guy' means 'I'm gonna be dating leather-wearing alcoholics and complaining about them to you'.

Phoebe: Or, or, you know, um, 'I think we should see other people' means 'Ha, ha, I already am'.

#### **Translation:**

Mónica: Uh, no. El auténtico significado de esa frase es 'Jamás me verás desnudo'.

Rachel: ¿Desde cuándo?

Joey: Desde siempre. Es un lenguaje preestablecido (1). La típica frase, 'No es por ti' significa 'Es por ti'.

Chandler: O 'Eres tan simpático' significa 'Voy a salir con aficionados al sadomasoquismo y desahogaré mis penas con ellos' (2).

Phoebe: O por ejemplo, 'Deberíamos salir más a menudo' (3) significa 'Ha, ha, yo ya lo hago'.

#### **Comments:**

- (1) Even though the main idea is well preserved, I think it's funnier to specify that it is *dating* language. I don't see why the translator couldn't just say “*Desde siempre. Es el lenguaje de las citas*”.
- (2) It's totally wrong. What Chandler is saying is that when a woman tells you that “You're nice”, she is going to go out with other guys and complain about them to you, which means she is going to treat you like a friend. In the Spanish translation, it seems that the woman is going to go out with them and complain about her life to them, which doesn't make any sense, really. It could seem that she is going to go out with them and then ignore the “nice guy” but it doesn't transmit this idea of friendship between both. It could have been translated “*desahogaré mis penas contigo*” or “*me quejaré a ti de ellos*”.
- (3) This sentence doesn't make any sense either... In English, what Phoebe means is that when somebody asks you if you are willing to be with more than one person at the same time, this person already is. In Spanish, it just means that if someone tells you

that you should go out more often (go to the movies, to the restaurant...), they already are. But it is wrong, it is not the same case at all. The translation should have been “*‘Deberíamos ver a otra gente’ significa ‘ja, ja, yo ya lo hago’*”.

**Category:** translation mistakes

**Scene:** Monica is talking with her friends about her boyfriend, who they all really appreciate.

Monica: Can I ask you guys a question? Do you ever think that Alan is maybe, sometimes,... I don't know, a little too Alan?

Rachel: Well, no. That's impossible. You can never be too Alan.

Ross: Yeah, it's his, uh, innate Alan-ness that we adore.

Chandler: I personally could have a gallon of Alan.

**Translation:**

Mónica: ¿Puedo haceros otra pregunta? ¿No os parece que Alan a veces es demasiado... No sé, es demasiado Alan?

Rachel: Oh no, eso es imposible. Nunca podría ser demasiado.

Ross: Sí, creo que es su innata calidad humana (1) lo que más apreciamos.

Chandler: Sí, me gustaría parecerme a Alan (2).

**Comments:**

- (1) The translation is totally made up: Ross never says anything about his *"innata calidad humana"*, it doesn't make any sense to answer to someone who asks you if you don't think that a person is too "that person" that "you like their human quality". Why can't we be creative here? *"Sí, creo que es su Alanismo/Alanidad innato/a lo que más apreciamos"* or *"Sí, creo que es el hecho de que sea tan Alan lo que más apreciamos"*.
- (2) Here too the translation is totally invented: Chandler never says that he would like to be like him... If we are afraid to translate it *"Podría pedir un galón de Alan"*, which is phonetically similar and therefore, also funny, we could just translate it *"Yo nunca me hartaría de Alan"*, but we can never make translations up...

**Category:** humor

**Scene: Phoebe brings a homeless friend of hers alphabet soup.**

Phoebe: I brought you alphabet soup.

Lizzie: Did you pick out the vowels?

Phoebe: Yes. But I left in the Ys. 'Cause, you know, "sometimes y".

**Translation:**

Phoebe: Te he traído sopa de letras.

Lizzie: ¿Le has quitado las vocales?

Phoebe: Sí, pero le he dejado las i griegas, porque ya sabes, siempre van bien.

**Comments:**

In Spanish, the song "AEIOU Sometimes Y" is not famous at all, so it's a good thing that the translator chose to take it out. However, saying "*siempre van bien*" doesn't make any sense. It has nothing to do with the fact that for some people the y is a vowel and for others it isn't. We could have said "*He dejado las i griegas. Para algunos son vocales*".

**Category:** Cultural reference



## **Friends: season 2, episode 1**

### **Scene 1: Monica, Phoebe, Chandler and Joey are in Monica and Rachel's apartment talking.**

Monica: Guys, you got your hair cut. (To Joey and Chandler)

Chandler: Yes, yes, we did, thanks to Vidal Buffay.

Phoebe: 'Cause, you know, (in that voice) if you don't look good, we don't look good. I love that voice.

#### **Translation:**

Mónica: Chicos... estrenáis corte de pelo. (A Joey y Chandler)

Chandler: Sí... así es... gracias a Vidal Buffay.

Phoebe: (Con una voz rara) Porque, ya sabes... si tú no quedas satisfecho... nosotros tampoco. ¡Me encanta esa voz!

#### **Comments:**

Vidal Sassoon was a famous British hairdresser. His company's advertisements made popular the line "If you don't look good, we don't look good". I think that in Spain, he isn't famous at all, which makes me think that maintaining "Vidal Buffay" is not a good idea (Buffay is Phoebe's family name). I would prefer something like "Phoebe Llongueras" (which reminds of Lluís Llongueras) or any other name that reminds of a famous hairdresser. We could also say "gracias a la peluquera Buffay", which would be a good solution. About the line "If you don't look good, we don't look good", I think that the translation problem is well managed.

**Category:** cultural reference

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### **Scene 2: Rachel comes into the apartment where Joey, Chandler, Monica and Phoebe are and she is out of breath.**

Rachel: (entering, out of breath) Airport, airport. Ross, not alone, Julie, arm around her. Cramp, cramp.

Chandler: Ok, I think she's trying to tell us something. Quick, get the verbs.

#### **Translation:**

Rachel: (que entra corriendo y sin aliento) Aeropuerto, aeropuerto. Ross, no solo, Julie, abrazado a ella. Calambre, calambre, calambre.

Chandler: Oíd... creo que intenta decirnos algo... rápido... llama a un intérprete.

**Comments:**

I think that this scene is still funny, because an interpret also means that we can't understand anything. But we could also say "Rápido, ve a por los verbos".

**Category:** humor

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**Scene 3: Monica and Phoebe are talking in their apartment.**

Monica: Well, I was thinking, that you gave the guys such great haircuts, I thought, maybe you'd like to do mine?

Phoebe: Ohh! No.

Monica: Why not?

Phoebe: Because, I'm just... I'm incredibly anal and an unbelievable control freak.

Monica: No you're not.

Phoebe: I know I'm not, but you are, and I was trying to spare your feelings.

**Translation:**

Mónica: Verás... les has cortado tan bien el pelo a los chicos que a lo mejor te gustaría cortarme el mío.

Phoebe: Eeeem... No.

Mónica: ¿Por qué no?

Phoebe: Porque aún estoy en la fase anal y estoy obsesionada con controlarlo todo.

Mónica: No, no es cierto.

Phoebe: Ya sé que no... pero tú sí, no quería herir tus sentimientos.

**Comments:**

I think that this is one of the biggest mistakes I've come across until now. I have to admit that I didn't know that "anal" had another meaning besides the most common one, but if I had been a translator of Friends, I would obviously have looked it up. It is very easy: the second sense of the word is clearly explained even in the most general bilingual dictionary available online, Wordreference: "anal" can be translated by *quisquilloso* or *obsesivo*. Why has the translator chosen to translate it by *fase anal* (anal stage in English, a Freudian concept)? Just by reviewing their work, the translator would have noticed that it didn't make any sense in this context. My suggestion is "Porque soy muy tiquismiquis/ quisquillosa y estoy obsesionada con controlarlo todo".

**Category:** translation mistake

### **Friends: season 2, episode 3**

#### **Scene: They're all talking in the living room.**

Phoebe: You name one woman that you broke up with for a real reason.

Chandler: Maureen Rosilla.

Ross: "'Cause she doesn't hate Yanni," is not a real reason.

#### **Translation:**

Phoebe: Dime una sola mujer con la que hayas roto por una razón realmente válida.

Chandler: Maureen Rosilla.

Ross: El que no odie a Snoopy no es una razón realmente válida.

#### **Comments:**

I actually think that this is a good translation because in this case, since Yanni isn't mentioned again later, it's a good call to say something that Spanish understand without being too Spanish (for example, saying "Que no odie a Belén Esteban" would be functionally correct, i.e. it tells us that Chandler broke up with somebody that no good reason, but it would be strange because everybody knows that this is an American show).

#### **Category: humor**

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### **Friends: season 2, episode 4**

#### **Scene 1: They're all talking in the living room, revealing secrets about each other.**

Phoebe: You have a third nipple?

Chandler: (to Monica) You bitch.

Ross: Whip it out, whip it out.

Phoebe: Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!

Chandler: C'mon, there's nothin' to see, it's just a tiny bump, it's totally useless.

Rachel: Oh as, as opposed to your other multi-functional nipples?

#### **Translation:**

Phoebe: ¿Tienes tres tetillas?

Chandler: ¡Qué zorra!

Ross: ¡Enséñanosla, enséñanosla!

Phoebe: ¡Si, si!

Chandler: No. Oh, por favor, no hay nada que ver, es solo un bultito, no sirve para nada.

Rachel: ¿Es diferente, acaso, de tus otras tetillas?

**Comments:**

Even though this is funny, I think the word “multi-functional” is more. I think that the explicit idea that it’s funny to say that a third nipple is useless since the others also are should be preserved. I would suggest: “Ya, no como las otras, que son multifuncionales”.

**Category:** humor

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**Scene 2: They’re all talking in a bar.**

Julie: Where you goin'?

Phoebe: Um, I'm gonna go meet Duncan, he's skating tonight at the Garden, he's in the Capades.

Joey: The Ice Capades?

Chandler: No, no, the gravel capades. Yeah, the turns aren't as fast but when Snoopy falls... funny.

**Translation:**

Julie: ¿A dónde vas?

Phoebe: Mm, he quedado con Duncan esta noche, patina en el Garden, actúa con los Capados.

Joey: ¿Los Capados sobre hielo?

Chandler: No, sobre aceite. Los giros son tan rápidos que si uno se cae, queda monísima.

**Comments:**

I think that this is a very hard joke to translate into Spanish because it involves a cultural reference and a very peculiar humor (Chandler’s humor). I still think that translating “the capades” “Los capados” is a real mistake, since it means something in Spanish that it doesn’t mean in English. I think it would be better to leave it in English “Actúa con los *Capades*”. Then, I don’t understand why translating “gravel” by “aceite” and generally changing the whole sentence. Also, it’s not funny in Spanish because it doesn’t make any sense. One of my suggestions would be: “Los Capades sobre hielo?” “No, sobre piedras. No es tan rápido, pero cuando se cae la mascota, hace mucha gracia”. I still think that this is hard to translate.

**Category:** translation mistake (but also humor and cultural reference)

## **Friends: season 2, episode 5**

### **Scene 1: They're all in a restaurant ordering their meals.**

Chandler: I will have the uh, Cajun catfish.

Waiter: Anything else?

Chandler: Yes, how 'bout a verse of Killing Me Softly? (pause) You're gonna sneeze on my fish, aren't you?

### **Translation:**

Chandler: Yo quiero la carpa Cajún.

Camarero: ¿Algo más?

Chandler: Sí, ¿qué tal si nos tararea algo? (pausa) ¿Va a estornudar en mi pescado, verdad?

### **Comments:**

I think that the translator is right to take off the cultural reference about “Killing Me Softly” since it isn’t famous in Spain. What’s more, the humor is totally preserved, since what is funny is the fact that Chandler is asking something totally out of place to the waiter.

**Category:** cultural reference

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**Scene 2: They're all in the living room of Rachel and Monica's apartment. Since Rachel, Phoebe and Joey don't have as much money as Chandler, Ross and Monica, those have decided to pay the tickets to a concert they had planned to go for them. They say that they think it's charity and it makes them feel bad so they refuse to go to the concert.**

Monica: Guys, we bought the tickets.

Phoebe: Oh, well, then you'll have extra seats, you know, for all your tiaras and stuff.

Chandler: (to Phoebe) Why did you look at me when you said that?

### **Translation:**

Mónica: Chicos, ya hemos comprado las entradas.

Phoebe: Oh, entonces os sobrarán asientos para dejar los bolsos, y eso.

Chandler: ¿Por qué me miras así al decir eso?

**Comments:**

I think the problem here is that the humor about the fact that they are rich is lost. Every woman has a purse, but not every woman has a tiara. This is a really specific object that only very few people have (queens, for example). The problem is that here, by saying “bolso”, it’s not funny on this level: it is just only on the level that she talks about a feminine object looking at a man. In Spanish, a *tiara* is not very known, and a *diadema* can also be a headband. I was thinking about “Entonces os sobrarán asientos para dejar vuestros collares de perlas”, since it is an expensive jewel that is specific to women.

**Category:** humor

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**Scene 3:** Chandler and Joey used to be roommates. Eddie is Chandler’s new roommate. They’re all in the living room.

Chandler: Joey, this is my new roommate Eddie.

Eddie: Nice to meet ya.

Joey: Likewise. Uh, I'll take that. (Grabs moose hat) It's what I came for. So, this is new. Where'd you two meet?

Eddie: At the uh, supermarket, in the uh, ethnic food section. I helped him pick out a chorizo. (They both laugh)

**Translation:**

Chandler: Joey, este es mi nuevo compañero, Eddie.

Eddie: Encantado.

Joey: Lo mismo digo. (Cogiendo la gorra de alce que tiene Eddie en la mano) Ya me la llevo, es a lo que había venido. ¡Vaya! ¡Qué novedad! ¿Dónde os conocisteis?

Eddie: En el supermercado, en la sección de comida étnica. Le ayudé a elegir un buen chorizo. (Se ríen los dos)

**Comments:**

I think that here, the problem is that “ethnic food” can’t be a chorizo, simply because it’s typically Spanish. Any food specialties from any other country would have been fine (I also think that in order to be coherent it would be better to pick another country besides the United States, since a Spanish public could ask themselves how it’s possible that American food is found in the ethnic section). I would propose: *Le ayudé a elegir un buen Roquefort*. Or *Le ayudé a elegir rollitos de primavera*.

**Category:** cultural reference

## **The Big Bang Theory: season 1 episode 1**

**Scene:** Sheldon and Leonard enter a waiting room and Leonard tells the receptionist all the answers to her crossword puzzle. She gives them forms to fill out.

Receptionist: Fill these out.

Leonard: Thank you. We'll be right back.

Receptionist: Oh, take your time. I'll just finish my crossword puzzle. Oh, wait.

### **Translation:**

Recepcionista: Rellenad esto.

Leonard: Gracias. Ahora mismo volvemos.

Recepcionista: No tengáis prisa. Mientras, terminaré mi crucigrama. O esperaré.

### **Comments:**

I think that saying "*o esperaré*" makes sense here, since she realizes that she can't finish her crossword puzzle and she says she'll just wait. But in the original, she says "Oh, wait" because she pretends she's just realized she can't finish her crossword puzzle so that Leonard feels guilty about doing it himself. It's irony, and we can see it on her face. So why did the Spanish translator said "*O esperaré*" instead of "*Oh, espera*" or "*Ah, pues no*" or "*O no*"? I think that they heard "I'll just finish my crossword puzzle or wait" instead of "Oh, wait".

**Category:** translation mistake

**Scene:** Sheldon and Leonard are at a “high IQ sperm bank” and Sheldon feels that what they are doing is fraud.

Sheldon: No. We are committing genetic fraud. There’s no guarantee that our sperm is going to generate high IQ offspring, think about that. I have a sister with the same basic DNA mix who hostesses at Fuddruckers.

**Translation:**

Sheldon: No. Cometemos un fraude genético. No hay ninguna garantía de que nuestro esperma vaya a generar niños inteligentes, piénsalo. Tengo una hermana con el mismo ADN que trabaja en una hamburguesería.

**Comments:**

I think this is a very good example of what to do with cultural references that don’t exist in Spanish culture. Fuddruckers is a restaurant specialized in hamburgers that is not known in Spain, so saying “hamburguesería” is just fine. In my opinion, we can also say “Burger king” or “Mc Donald’s” since it’s known in Spain and it’s American.

**Category:** Cultural reference



**Scene:** Sheldon, Leonard, Raj, Howard and Penny are in a car and Sheldon knows that Leonard wants to go out with Penny and talks to him about his possibilities.

Sheldon: I don't know what your odds are in the world as a whole, but as far as the population of this car goes, you're a veritable Mack Daddy.

**Translation:**

Sheldon: No sé qué probabilidades tendrás de ligar en el mundo pero entre la población de este coche tú eres un verdadero Casanova.

**Comments:**

I think this is a good example of translation for a cultural reference, since Mack Daddy isn't known in Spanish culture.

**Category:** Cultural reference

## **The Big Bang Theory: season 1 episode 2**

**Scene:** Sheldon is at his friend Penny's house tidying up while she is sleeping and Leonard tries to tell him that it is a bad idea.

Leonard: Do you realize that if Penny wakes up, there is no reasonable explanation as to why we're here?

Sheldon: I just gave you a reasonable explanation.

Leonard: No, no. You gave me an explanation; its reasonableness will be determined by a jury of your peers.

Sheldon: Don't be ridiculous. I have no peers.

### **Translation:**

Leonard: ¿Eres consciente de que si Penny se despierta, no hay ninguna explicación racional para que estemos aquí?

Sheldon: Acabo de darte una explicación racional.

Leonard: No, no. Me has dado una explicación. Si es racional o no tendrá que decidirlo un jurado más sensato que tú.

Sheldon: No digas tonterías. Yo soy muy sensato.

### **Comments:**

I think that in Spanish the term for "jury of peers" is "*jurado de sus pares/iguales*". Maybe it's not as used as in English and that's why the translator made up this answer, but in Spanish we don't see that Sheldon is arrogant. They could have said "*un jurado de tus pares*" and then "*No digas tonterías. No tengo pares*".

**Category:** translation mistake

**Scene:** Sheldon and Leonard are at Penny's house, Sheldon wants to clean and Leonard tries to convince him to go, but he doesn't want to.

Sheldon: I am not leaving until I'm done.

Leonard: O-o-o-oh! (Collapses against wall)

Sheldon: If you have time to lean, you have time to clean.

Leonard: Oh, what the hell.

**Translation:**

Sheldon: No pienso irme hasta que acabe.

Leonard: Ooooh!

Sheldon: Si me ayudas a recoger acabaremos antes.

Leonard: Vale, tú ganas.

**Comments:**

I think that the main idea is preserved here, that Sheldon has convinced Leonard to clean with him, but he is nicer in Spanish. He just tells him that they will be through with cleaning if they both do it, but in English, he "attacks" him and says this idiom, "If you have time to lean you have time to clean", which is not particularly nice. In Spanish, I don't think there is any equivalent (I have looked for it in forums and dictionaries in vain), but I still think that Sheldon should be less nice in this context: in English he doesn't just say "If you helped me, we would be through with it faster", he clearly criticizes him with this idiom that implies that the person is lazy. What about saying: "*Si te sobra tiempo para quejarte, te sobra tiempo para ayudarme*" or, if it is too long, "*¿Qué tal si me ayudas en vez de quejarte?*". We can't create an idiom from scratch, but at least we will transmit Sheldon's bitterness and criticism and the fact that he is very unpleasant with Leonard.

**Category:** translation mistake

### **The Big Bang Theory: season 1 episode 3**

**Scene:** Leonard comes home after talking with Penny and he doesn't say a word.

Sheldon: Penny for your thoughts.

**Translation:**

Sheldon: Un penique por tus pensamientos.

**Comments:**

This is a pun with the expression "A penny for your thoughts", which means that someone is quiet and the person wants to know what the other is thinking, and the name Penny, that Leonard is in love with. In Spanish, the expression exists too and the way that Sheldon pronounces it ("*Un peni... que por tus pensamientos*") is very good because it is also a pun in Spanish.

**Category:** humor

**Scene:** Leonard tries to ask Penny out but he gets a little nervous.

Leonard: Good afternoon Penny, so hi, hey. Uh... I was wondering if you had plans for dinner.

Penny: Uh, do you mean dinner tonight?

Leonard: There is an inherent ambiguity in the word "dinner". Technically it refers to the largest meal of the day whenever it is consumed, so, to clarify here, by dinner I mean supper.

Penny: Supper?

Leonard: Or dinner. I was thinking six thirty, if you can go, or a different time.

**Translation:**

Leonard: Buenas tardes, Penny. Oye, hola, mmm... Quería saber si tienes planes para la cena.

Penny: ¿Para cenar esta noche?

Leonard: Hay cierta ambigüedad en el término "cenar". Técnicamente se refiere a la última comida del día así que podemos quedar a la hora de la cena para comer algo.

Penny: ¿Comer?

Leonard: O cenar. Había pensado hacia las 6.30, o a otra hora.

**Comments:**

I think this is a really good translation, since in Spanish "cenar" doesn't have any other meaning. It is as good as it can be, because the sentence in Spanish transmits the confusion of Leonard and that is enough, in my opinion.

**Category:** Cultural reference

## **The Big Bang Theory: season 2, episode 1**

**Scene:** Sheldon and Penny are in the laundry room talking about Leonard, who could become Penny's boyfriend. He's also Sheldon's roommate.

Penny: Here's my question, has Leonard ever dated, you know, a regular girl?

Sheldon: Well I assume you're not referring to digestive regularity? Because I've come to learn that such inquiries are inappropriate.

Penny: No, I meant has he ever been involved with someone who wasn't a *braniac*?

Sheldon: Oh. Well, a few years ago he did go out with a woman who had a PhD in French Literature.

Penny: How is that not a *braniac*?

Sheldon: Well, for one thing, she was French. For another, it was literature.

### **Translation:**

Penny: La pregunta es: ¿ha salido alguna vez Leonard con una chica corriente?

Sheldon: Supongo que no me estarás preguntando con cuántas chicas ha salido. Porque contarte eso no me parecería apropiado. (1)

Penny: No, quiero decir que si ha salido con alguien que no fuera un cerebro.

Sheldon: Oh. Bueno, hace unos años salió con una mujer que tenía un doctorado en literatura francesa.

Penny: ¿Por qué ella no era un cerebro?

Sheldon: Bueno, para empezar era en literatura. Y además, francesa. (2)

### **Comments:**

- (1) I think that this wordplay is very hard to translate. When Penny says a "regular girl", she means a "normal girl", but Sheldon, who is always misinterpreting things and living in his own world, thinks that she refers to a digestively regular person. In Spanish, the word *regular* only has the meaning of something that happens at uniform intervals, not as synonym of "normal". In order to preserve a quid pro quo, I would say something like "¿Ha salido alguna vez con una chica normal?" "Supongo que no te referirás a normalidad digestiva, porque me han dicho que es inapropiado contar eso." However, I'm not completely sure about it and whether a Spanish public would understand it and laugh. Maybe this is why the translator chose to take it off. We can't preserve the humor in every case, but in the episode, we can hear laughs at the end of

the Spanish version, and it's not funny. This is why we might as well take them off (they do so sometimes, so it's possible).

- (2) This segment is much easier. Sheldon is saying that that girl was not intelligent because even though she had a PhD in French literature, it was easy for her because she was French and because it was literature (he implies that literature is easy). In the Spanish version, we get the idea that literature is easy for him ("Para empezar, era literatura"), but we totally miss out on the fact that she is French, because he implies that literature is easy, but that French literature is even easier ("Y además, francesa"). The solution seems clear to me: "Bueno, para empezar, era francesa. Y además, era en literatura".

**Category:** humor and translation mistake

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**Scene:** Leonard and Penny are talking in her apartment. She is upset because her boyfriend posted intimate details about their sex life on a blog.

Leonard: Okay, well, you know, this isn't that bad. It just paints the picture of a very affectionate woman who's open to expressing her affection in non-traditional locales.

Penny: Oh God!

Leonard: Elevators, parks, movie theatres, out of curiosity, is this subway the transportation system or subway the sandwich shop?

Penny: Sandwich shop.

Leonard: Doesn't that violate the health code?

Penny: No, at the sub shop we were only making out.

**Translation:**

Leonard: Oye, Penny... Oye, esto no es para tanto. Solo es el retrato de una mujer afectuosa que no teme expresar su cariño en lugares poco convencionales.

Penny: ¡Oh, no!

Leonard: Ascensores, parques, en el cine... Solo por curiosidad, esta foto en la que pone subway, ¿está hecha en la tienda de bocatas?

Penny: Sí, está hecha allí.

Leonard: ¿No infringisteis las normas de sanidad?

Penny: No, en el subway solo nos dimos el lote.

**Comments:**

The problem here is that in Spanish, *subway* only refers to the sandwich shop. However, I think that it is a bad translation, first of all because there is incoherence (Leonard talks about a photo but then he doesn't know that there they just kissed) and also because it changes the original idea: in my opinion, it's worse to publish a photo of somebody on a blog than just telling stories about that person. One of my solutions would be: "Solo por curiosidad, con "campo" se refiere al campo o al supermercado Alcampo?". This way we can maintain the double sense of the word and he actually asks a real question.

**Category:** humor

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**Scene:** Sheldon is listening to a Chinese recording because he is taking classes and doesn't hear Penny arriving so he's scared.

Penny (tapping him on the shoulder): Sheldon.

Sheldon (jumping in panic): Aieeee ya! Xia si wo le.

Penny: I'm sorry. Look, do you have a second?

Sheldon: A second what? Pair of underwear?

**Translation:**

Penny (tocándole el hombro): Sheldon.

Sheldon (en pánico): Aieeee ya! Xia si wo le.

Penny: Perdona. Oye, ¿tienes un segundo?

Sheldon: ¿Un segundo par de calcetines?

**Comments:**

The problem here is that this is a really bad translation and we can't possibly understand the joke in Spanish. Sheldon says "a second pair of underwear" because he has been really scared. In Spanish, it doesn't make any sense, apart maybe from the fact that we think that Sheldon is, as always, in his own world. I think that a good solution could be "¿Un segundo qué? ¿Bóxer?". This way, we would keep the reference to the scary part and that he has been very surprised.

**Category:** humor



## Findings

When I started working on my TFG, I had a clear objective in mind: learning about translating humor in an audiovisual context. In order to do that, I decided to define my methodology clearly and to be rigorous: analyzing episodes translation segment by translation segment, understanding the humor or the cultural reference in it, describing the strategy (when there was one...) used by the translator and then proposing a better solution. This defined methodology has allowed me to be neutral and analyze the translation impartially. My other objectives were to compare the translation of the two series considering several factors (for example their time difference) and to draw a general conclusion about translation of humor in cultural products and how it affects its popularity. I will therefore comment those several points in this order.

One of the most important things I noticed about the translation of those shows is that there wasn't a clear general strategy used by the translator(s). As Juan José Martínez Sierra describes in his article *"La manipulación del texto: sobre la dualidad extranjerización / familiarización en la traducción del humor en textos audiovisuales"*, when faced with cultural references, we have two main options: domestication and foreignizing. Domestication means to adapt whatever reference it was to the target audience, whereas foreignizing means the opposite: leaving as many cultural references of the original material in the translation. When we choose foreignizing, we basically have to translate the reference without adapting it, which allows the audience to look up those rich points and learn by themselves about the foreign culture. I won't give my personal opinion about which of these options is the best one, first of all because I don't think there is a best option, rather that there is a more adequate one in every case; and second because I think that it depends on what we consider the audience who watches dubbed American shows in Spanish wants: do they want to have fun or do they want to learn about American culture and humor? There will obviously be people that want one and people that want the other.

However, I am convinced that translators should be consistent. For the four years I have been studying English at University, all of my English teachers always tell us that it's fine to have an American dialect or a British one, but that we have to pick one and be consistent in its use. I think that this should be the case here and, unfortunately, it is not. Neither of the translations is consistent as they have opted for foreignizing in some cases and domestication in others. For example, in *Friends*, in one occasion, "Billy don't be a hero" has been translated as "No te hagas el héroe", which is a clear example of foreignizing (what's more, it isn't even understandable for a Spanish audience); in another occasion, however, "Mr. Potato Head" has been translated as "Señor del tiempo", which is a case of domestication because the translator didn't think that a Spanish audience would understand the cultural reference to Mr. Potato Head. In *The Big Bang Theory*, we can see at some point that "Fuddruckers" has been translated as "hamburguesería", when it could have been translated as "Burger King" or "McDonald's" since it is also famous in Spain, which shows us that the translator has chosen domestication, and at another point, "subway" has been translated as "subway" even if the segment loses the funny part and could have been translated for example as "Alcampo", which shows us that the translator has chosen foreignizing. Those are just a few examples of the

inconsistency of the translation, which I have been able to observe in both shows. One of my hypotheses to explain this is that there wasn't coherence between the translators, that the project manager didn't make the effort to create a structure aiming to coordinate them. Another of my hypotheses is that the translators lacked motivation and were insufficiently conscientious in their work, which is observable in other examples.

Another really important thing I noticed doing this work is that translators often prioritize the sense of the phrase above the humor, taking the humor out of the character's words, for example, a play on words, and not preserving what is funny in that moment. We can see this for example in *Friends* when Chandler says "I personally could have a gallon of Alan" and the Spanish translation is "Me gustaría parecerme a Alan". In other cases, we can see that neither the humor nor the meaning of the sentence were maintained, for example in *Friends* when Phoebe says "But I left in the Ys. 'Cause, you know, 'sometimes y'" and the Spanish translation is "pero le he dejado las i griegas, porque ya sabes, siempre van bien".

Comparing the two shows is complex. When we add up the translation segments of both, we can see that there are more in *Friends* than in *The Big Bang Theory* (21 compared to 11) and that there are more translation segments in *The Big Bang Theory* that I rate as well-translated. Since I watched the exact same number of episodes in both series and I found 10 more segments in *Friends*, and *Friends* has a percentage of "good" segments, 14%, whereas *The Big Bang Theory* has a percentage of 36%, we can conclude that *The Big Bang Theory* is better translated. This is confirmed by the fact that this series has "only" 4 translation mistakes compared to *Friends* that has 9.

However, in relation to the above, it is important to point out that having watched the same number of episodes for each series and discussed every segment that I saw fit, either well translated or badly, I found less to discuss in *The Big Bang Theory*, which is why there are more episodes described in this TFG of *Friends* (since in some episodes of *The Big Bang Theory* I didn't find anything to comment). Obviously, this approach is subjective even though if I have tried to be as impartial as I could, therefore it could be argued that some of the segments I rated as well-translated were not, and vice-versa. I have tried to be neutral in my classification too, since proposing improvements to segments I considered "good translations", for example, and I also have tried to understand and explain why I considered some segments "bad translations".

However, aside of this broad evaluation of the translations, I would like to make some additional comments. First of all, even if there are less translation segments badly translated in *The Big Bang Theory*, there is an overall important feature that I haven't mentioned. The main character, Sheldon, is characterized by a lack of empathy and is socially inept (he is always very cold with everybody, with severe look on his face). Some say that he has Asperger's syndrome. His way of talking in the original version is consistent with those traits and even reinforces them: he always talks in a flat, toneless voice, very calmly, with way too sophisticated vocabulary. In Spanish, the voice doesn't have any of those characteristics and is similar to the others'. What's more, Rajesh Ramayan Koothrappali, better known as Raj, is Indian and has an obvious Indian accent in the original version. This provokes a lot of funny situations in the original series. However, in Spanish, this type of humor can't be translated and when one of

the characters is imitating Rajesh, however funny in the original, it's reduced to a mere imitation of some other theoretical features that Rajesh has in the Spanish version.

Even if those features seem very important to me, I also have to add that in *Friends* there is a similar problem with Emily, Ross's fiancée, since she is from London and her accent really stands out compared to the others', who are from New York. However, Emily is just a secondary character, whereas Rajesh and Sheldon are main characters that appear in every episode. About Sheldon's problem with his voice, I have to say that this is not the translators' responsibility, but I only comment which series is better to me in the Spanish version compared to their original. Nevertheless, I think that characters with an accent could have a special feature in their way of speaking in order to compensate.

The majority of translation segments in *Friends* describe errors in handling cultural references, that show that the translator didn't know how to deal with them and left them as they were even though they were not understandable for a Spanish audience, for example in the case of "Billy don't be a hero" translated as "No te hagas el héroe" or of the reference about Vidal Sassoon. Foreignizing certainly means to be as close to the original as possible, but when the audience will be able to notice that there is a cultural reference there and not only wonder what the sentence meant. In *Friends*, I also noted too many translation mistakes that shouldn't be allowed in this kind of high-profile series (for example, translating "I'm extremely anal" as "Aún estoy en la fase anal"). Other comments are less relevant because they imply small connotations or changes, but some of them lead to a misunderstanding of the situation (for example in page 9 when Monica and Paul talk about their fifth date and it is translated as "la próxima cita" when the Spanish audience knows perfectly that this is their first date). Other changes "just" lead to a complete loss of humor, which is ironic for a comedy series.

In *The Big Bang Theory*, my comments are more positive than in *Friends*, and lead in general to a less funny situation but not a complete loss of humor like in the other series. We can really see that the translator has made an effort to maintain humor when they could, to create a joke when the original one couldn't be used. My comments were more along the lines of suggestions than corrections, unlike in *Friends*. Obviously, in some cases, I found a total loss of humor, but it was way less frequent than in *Friends*.

I have been trying to explain this phenomenon and the first idea that came to my mind is that those two series have a 10-year difference. I considered that before starting to work but I didn't expect to see this many differences. But can it explain everything? I don't think so. Of course, within those 10 years, translation has improved a lot and more research has been done. Moreover, we can consider that with globalization, foreign culture, especially American, is widely known: in *The Big Bang Theory*, the movies or series mentioned are famous all around the world, so there isn't any cultural reference problem there anymore. It was "easier", in this aspect, for *The Big Bang Theory*, to be better translated. Other factors could obviously explain it: better translators, better salary to motivate them, better tools to help them, or better coordination.

What I'm sure of, is that translation of comedy series is polemic and will certainly stay so. I always hear the debate: "Should we see a foreign show in original version with subtitles or the dubbed version?" Some argue that a lot is lost in translation along the way and that it is

even worse with dubbing, whereas others think that reading subtitles is too hard and distracts us from watching what is actually happening, or that some people can see a movie but can't read on a small TV screen or from across the room. I personally think that something is lost in translation either way and that both sides have sustainable arguments. If someone is interesting in learning a language and discovering a culture, I would advise them to watch everything in original version with subtitles, but not everyone shares that passion that us translators have about languages and cultures and I think that we should respect that.

However, at least until lately, the most accessible way to watch foreign shows was with the dubbed version and we can't deny that in some cases it produced very strong debates between linguists and their friends. I remember when I started my TFG people telling me that it was a really bad idea because *Friends* and *The Big Bang Theory* were "horribly translated shows", or that "they thought that they were terrible shows until they saw the original version". Nevertheless, I think that people should try and do the translator's work before judging it.

This also reminds me of friends of mine telling me they have "read Fernando Pessoa and liked him a lot" while I was thinking to myself: what you read was actually the translator's version and you have no idea what Fernando Pessoa sounds like... Of course, with books, it is a lot harder to compare versions, unlike movies and shows that we all have at least one time watched in the original version and wondered: "How could the translator have possibly resolved this problem?"

Translation certainly affects popularity of cultural products, but I still wonder if it does so positively or negatively. I suppose it depends on the medium, the genre of the material, the translator and the audience's expectations.

However, what I'm sure of is that during those last few months, I have learnt a lot. About rigor, perseverance, and seriousness; about self-analysis, doubting and humility; about translating and, last but not least, about not judging others' work before knowing how hard a task it is.

## Conclusion

After carrying out this investigation, I can say that those two shows weren't translated in the same way: *Friends* has a lot more of translation mistakes that I think could have been avoided, especially for a show this famous; *The Big Bang Theory* is better translated than *Friends*, maybe thanks to the cultural references that are now globalized (this show has been aired since 2007 whereas *Friends* was aired between 1994 and 2004). In both shows, there has been incoherence in the strategy applied towards cultural products: foreignizing or domesticating. Obviously, it is an important part of humor, and maybe this could explain why the two shows are less funny when dubbed: sometimes the audience doesn't understand the humor in the translation nor why some parts of the show seem to be completely adapted to Spanish people whereas others are almost impossible to understand for a non-American audience. The two shows have shown me that indeed everything loses something in translation, but maybe, especially in *Friends* case, losing so much could have been avoided.